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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Housekeepers' Chat

Tuesday, April 1, 1930.

Not for Publication

Subject: "How to Save Money on the Ice Bill." Approved by Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available: "Care of Food in the Home."

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How can we save money on the ice bill? All the money we save this summer on food, ice, and so forth, will increase the vacation fund -- and goodness knows we all need a vacation this year. Going on with household work, year in and year out, without a change of scenery, is too much to expect of any homemaker.

To get back to the subject of the ice bill -- a question often asked me is whether one can reduce the ice bill by wrapping the ice in newspapers, or in a cloth.

That's a good question. Two or three women have told me that they save ice by wrapping it in heavy paper, or in heavy cloth. No doubt they do save ice, but that isn't the point. We want to save food, not ice.

Let's take half a minute to consider the principle of ice refrigeration. Ice placed in a refrigerator melts by absorbing heat from the surrounding air. This air, becoming colder and colder, settles to the lower part of the refrigerator, while the warmer air rises, gives up heat by coming in contact with the ice, and in turn becomes chilled, and sinks to the bottom. These cold currents of air come in contact with the food, absorb heat from the food, and so cool it.

All this being true, we want the cooled air to circulate continuously and rapidly, in the refrigerator. All spaces for the passage of air from the ice chamber should be kept open. It is a mistake to wrap the ice in paper or in cloth. Such a covering retards the circulation of air, and insulates the ice from the rest of the refrigerator.

Each article of food, placed in the refrigerator, contains a definite amount of heat, that will melt a definite amount of ice. Therefore, don't put hot foods into the refrigerator. Cool them to room temperature first.

There's another way to make ice last longer. Don't use it to cool such things as the tops of carrots, the outside leaves of lettuce, or the thick paper wrapped around parcels which come from the market, because all these things will be discarded later. Furthermore, ice is wasted when vegetables and fruits that are to be prepared almost immediately are placed in the refrigerator, and taken out after a few minutes.

As I said before, the main object in using a refrigerator is to save food, not ice. Real economy in both is to have well-insulated walls. It is also good economy to keep the ice chamber well-stocked, to open the door only when necessary, and for as brief periods as possible, and to put nothing into the refrigerator that does not need to be kept cool. Every food put into the refrigerator should pay for the ice it melts.

Keep the refrigerator scrupulously clean. Put into it only clean food, clean ice, and clean dishes. Any food spilled should be wiped up immediately with a clean damp cloth. The ice chamber, the drainpipe, and the trap must be kept free from sediment and slime. Wash them occasionally with hot water and washing soda, rinse with cold water, and wipe dry.

As every housekeeper knows, food is likely to draw such pests as rats and mice, flies, ants, and other household insects, unless supplies are kept covered, or in closed containers, and all garbage is promptly disposed of. Besides these pests, we must protect our food from bacteria, yeasts, molds, and animal parasites.

The common housefly is one of the worst offenders when it comes to polluting food. The housefly fully deserves the name "typhoid fever" fly, and it is also a known carrier of the bacteria of cholera, dysentery, and tuberculosis. Even so-called "fly-specks," often deposited on food and dishes, may be infected with disease germs, and the eggs of dangerous parasites.

Since food costs so much, in money or work, or both, it should receive the best of care in the home. The Bureau of Home Economics has compiled a list of nine general rules, for checking or preventing food spoilage:

First, all foods should be kept clean; that is, protected from visible dirt, and from contamination by insects and other carriers of dangerous micro-organisms. Most kinds should also be kept cool. Dry foods, such as crackers, need to be prevented from absorbing moisture, and succulent foods, such as fresh vegetables, from losing it.

Second, milk, fresh meat, poultry, and fish should be kept at a temperature of 50 degrees Fahrenheit, or preferably less, in order to check the growth of micro-organisms which cause souring and decay.

Third, all fruits and vegetables to be eaten raw should be thoroughly washed, for even though they look clean, dangerous bacteria may cling to skins or leaves. As a rule, uncooked meats of any kind should not be eaten. Smoking meat does not kill parasites.

Fourth, left-over cooked foods should be kept cold and covered, used promptly, especially in warm weather, and, if possible, heated thoroughly before being served again. Dangerous poisons sometimes develop in such foods, without making noticeable changes in taste or smell.

Fifth, fats and fat foods, such as nut meats and chocolate, should be kept cool, and in covered light-proof containers, to prevent their turning rancid.

Sixth, bread and cake should be stored in a covered box or dish which is scalded frequently, so that molds cannot develop.

Seventh, flour, sugar, cereals, and other dry groceries should be kept dry and protected from household pests. Tea, coffee, and spices hold their flavor best in air-tight containers.

Eighth, canned foods keep best in a cool, dry closet or storeroom. Those in glass jars should be shielded from the light to prevent possible fading.

Ninth, under household conditions, the refrigerator is oftentimes the best means of keeping food cool. Choose one with well-insulated walls, put only clean ice and clean food in clean containers into it, and keep it clean by the daily practice of genuine neatness.

And no more about refrigerators today. Tomorrow, I'll tell you about sun suits for children, and give you a menu and a new recipe. Baked bananas and rhubarb is the dessert on tomorrow's bill of fare, so please come prepared to write.

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